

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**IS U.S. FORCES KOREA STILL NEEDED ON THE KOREAN PENINSULA?**

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## **ABSTRACT**

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The U.S. – ROK Alliance has successfully served as a deterrent against war on the Korean peninsula for over fifty years. Recently, however, many younger Koreans, as well as many Americans, are questioning the rationale for maintaining a U.S. military force in Korea. This research project analyzes the strategic defense objectives of the Republic of Korea (ROK) and the United States to answer the question: Is U.S. Forces Korea still needed on the Korean peninsula? In answering this question, this paper considers the strategic implications of reducing or completely withdrawing the U.S. military presence from the peninsula, reviews steps being taken by the ROK to become more “self-reliant” with regard to self defense, assesses North – South Korean relations, and considers ROK’s possible role as a “power balancer” in the region.



## IS U.S. FORCES KOREA STILL NEEDED ON THE KOREAN PENINSULA?

The U.S. and ROK (Republic of Korea) have enjoyed a good and strong alliance for over fifty years. The alliance has successfully served as a deterrent against war on the peninsula. President George W. Bush and President Roh Moo-hyun attribute the long standing success of the alliance to the mutual benefit afforded to each side.<sup>1</sup> Some Koreans believe that the principle reason for the success of the alliance derives from the gratitude of those South Koreans who remember the North Korean invasion in June of 1950 and the years that followed. Professor Young Shik Lee, a Korean Fulbright scholar and a professor at Hannam University, Taejeon, South Korea, recalled that "America was viewed as the savior country, that saved Korea....Korea was very grateful, especially after the Korean War" for receiving significant economic aid.<sup>2</sup> Meredith Woo-Cumings, professor of political science, University of Michigan, and a member of the Japan Policy Research Institute supports Professor Lee's assessment about economic aid. According to Woo-Cumings, the U.S. – ROK Alliance was based on the U.S. opening its profitable markets to Korean imports and exports in addition to the U.S. providing support for Korea's political stability and security.<sup>3</sup> Over the past few years however, many younger Koreans as well as many Americans are questioning the rationale for maintaining U.S. Armed Forces in Korea.<sup>4</sup>

Each year a growing number of Americans and South Koreans debate the need for U.S. military presence in South Korea. Doug Bandow, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute contends that the ROK is no longer the strategic asset that it use to be, particularly not if the ROK will not allow the U.S. to project forces from Korea on contingency operations against nations in Northeast Asia.<sup>5</sup> The strategic defense objectives of both the ROK<sup>6</sup> and U.S.<sup>7</sup> are to maintain a stable region, prevent proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and combat terrorism. The capabilities of United States Forces Korea (USFK) and ROK military forces help to deter North Korean aggression and provide stability.<sup>8</sup> The technological advances of the U.S. Armed Forces, the desire of the ROK to assume a self-reliant defense posture, the possibility for unification of the two Koreas, and the ROK's desire to play the role of a power balancer in the region do not negate the need for U.S. military presence on the Korean peninsula. U.S. State Department officials in the ROK can also assist in maintaining regional security through diplomatic means if deemed necessary by the President of the U.S. Diplomatic instruments of power provide an alternative to military force.

## Background

The South Korean government was only two years old when on June 25, 1950, North Korean forces invaded. South Korean forces were no match on the ground or in the air. As a result, the South was pushed back about 40 miles to the Han River Bridge in Seoul – the country's capital. The country was in desperate need of military assistance. Four days later "on June 29, General Douglas MacArthur, the Commander-in-Chief of the U.S. Far East Command, inspected the Han River defense line....and resolved to defend South Korea."<sup>9</sup> On July 1, 1950, General MacArthur deployed a unit from the 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division called Task Force Smith. Under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Charles B. Smith, the Task Force quickly linked-up with the ROK Army and engaged North Korean forces. On July 5, 1950, the North Korean Army defeated Task Force Smith.<sup>10</sup> The blood spilled by Task Force Smith coupled with the reinforcement of 18,000 U.S. troops and General Walton H. Walker's (commander of United Nations ground forces) "stand or die" speech signaled the commitment of the U.S. and the start of its forward deployed status on the Korean peninsula.<sup>11</sup> When the "United Nations Security Council named the U.S. as the executive agent to implement the [UN] resolution and direct UN military operations in Korea"<sup>12</sup> President Syngman Rhee assigned all of the ROK's land, air, and sea forces to General MacArthur. Essentially General MacArthur had command and control authority for all ROK forces to help accomplish his mission. In 1994 the ROK regained peacetime control of its military forces. However, during wartime, control of ROK forces will revert back to the senior U.S./UN commander.<sup>13</sup>

## United States Defense Strategic Objectives

Prior to the U.S. entering the Korean War, President Truman and his administration were extremely concerned with the threat posed by the Soviet Union. "In August 1949, ...the Soviet Union tested its first atomic device. This event and the almost concurrent collapse of the Chinese Nationalists hastened debate within the administration as to whether the United States should develop a fusion, or hydrogen bomb."<sup>14</sup> President Truman supported strategic defense objectives similar to the current ones<sup>15</sup> published in the National Defense Strategy.<sup>16</sup> For example, Truman was an advocate of promoting peace and freedom for nation states through United Nations coordination as demonstrated with the UN resolution and U.S. involvement in the Korean War.<sup>17</sup> Another defense strategic objective may be "deterrence" when viewed through the establishment of a collective security arrangement. The creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization was in 1949 a defensive arrangement between the U.S. and multiple nations with the goal of preserving peace.

For decades after the Korean War, the primary U.S. strategic defense objective on the Korean peninsula was to deter aggression by the Democratic People Republic of Korea (DPRK) against the ROK.<sup>18</sup> The security alliance coupled with the deploying of U.S. forces in the ROK serve as a tripwire for U.S. military involvement should the DPRK attack. One can argue that the security cooperation between the U.S. and ROK have enabled the people of South Korea to enjoy over fifty years of peace somewhat irrespective of the actual number of U.S. troops physically on the ground.

At the end of the Cold War and into the post Cold War period, the primary defense objective was still to deter DPRK aggression. The tools being used to achieve the objective began to shift however. For example, other instruments of power were applied to bring about peace and stability on the peninsula. "In 1988, under the Reagan Administration, the U.S. undertook what was termed a "Modest Initiative" to open the window for greater contact with Pyongyang."<sup>19</sup> According to Acting Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Affairs under the Clinton Administration, Charles Kartman testified before Congress that the U.S. was taking steps to not only deter DPRK aggression, but more importantly, to promote a lasting peace that will lead to reunification of the peninsula.<sup>20</sup> Exercising diplomatic power in dealing with the DPRK clearly represented a change from deterring aggression by show of force to promoting peace and stability by engaging in talks. As a result, the U.S., ROK, and DPRK agreed to peace talks.<sup>21</sup>

The events of September 11, 2001 brought about changes in the structuring of U.S. military security within the ROK but not in the overall strategic defense objectives of the U.S. For example, the U.S. continues to serve as a deterrent against DPRK aggression and a stabilizing factor not only for the Korean peninsula but for the region of Northeast Asia as well.<sup>22</sup> Understandably the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan along with the Global War on Terrorism and other U.S. security commitments in Korea and Europe required the repositioning of military forces to help reduce the operational tempo placed on other units. The Second Infantry Division deployed a brigade combat team to Iraq that had been helping to deter North Korean aggression. However, other instruments of power were in place to demonstrate America's commitment to the ROK. The U.S. has employed diplomatic and economic instruments of power in addition to military power to deter DPRK aggression. Hopefully, the combined efforts of the instruments of power will create a lasting peace that will eventually lead to unification of the two Koreas. Some may argue that since 9/11 the ROK is less important to the U.S.<sup>23</sup> A more accurate assessment however would be that despite the global attention being focused on Iraq and Afghanistan, the U.S. still views its commitment to the ROK as essential. The U.S. is

particularly concerned about DPRK's nuclear weapons program and the possibility of DPRK proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). North Korea will continue to draw a watchful eye from the U.S. for several reasons: (1) DPRK is viewed as a security threat due to their large military forces and WMD capabilities; (2) if DPRK collapsed it would create a humanitarian disaster rife with hunger and huge number of refugees; and (3) DPRK poses a proliferation threat with regard to WMD to both state and non-state actors.<sup>24</sup>

#### South Korean Defense Strategic Objectives

After the defeat of Japan in World War II, the Soviet Union began moving troops into the Korean Peninsula.<sup>25</sup> As a result of the establishment of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel, the Soviets halted and created the DPRK as a Soviet-style government led by Kim IL Sung in the northern portion of the peninsula.<sup>26</sup> The Soviets were not to be taken lightly because in 1949 their influence prevailed over the Nationalists in China and the Soviets tested their first atomic bomb.<sup>27</sup> With the help of the Soviets, DPRK invaded the South but was later ejected by the U.S. led coalition.

The Armistice Agreement prompted the ROK to establish defense objectives to ensure their security. The expanding influence by the Soviets and China in East Asia convinced South Korean President Rhee that DPRK would invade again once U.S. and UN forces departed.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, President Rhee sought assurance from the U.S. and found it in the form of the Mutual Defense Treaty. The ROK's strategic defense objectives focused on defending themselves against external attack and deterring North Korean aggression.<sup>29</sup>

During the post Cold War period the ROK expanded its strategic defense objectives to include peaceful unification of the two Koreas and stability in the Northeast Asia region.<sup>30</sup> In 1998, former President of South Korea, Kim Dae Jung announced his "Sunshine Policy." One can argue that under Kim Dae Jung's administration the "Sunshine Policy" recognized or supported the changing security environment and the significance of the ROK's increased military power and posture in order to obtain their defense objectives.

The events of 9/11 in the U.S. have caused some adjustments in the military security situation within the Korean peninsula. However the strategic defense objectives to defend against attack, deter aggression from the DPRK, obtain a peaceful unification, and maintain regional stability remain.<sup>31</sup> One consequent of 9/11 was the deployment of 3000 ROK soldiers to Iraq.<sup>32</sup> Another consequent was developing security units to combat terrorism. The units are dedicated counter-terrorism organizations designed to handle potential terrorist attacks. These units are also prepared to counter North Korea's nuclear, biological, and chemical threats to the ROK.<sup>33</sup>



### Principle Differences Between the U.S. and ROK Defense Strategic Objectives

An analysis of the U.S. and the ROK's defense objectives reveals that; overall, there is no fundamental difference between the defense objectives of the two countries with respect to the Korean peninsula. The purpose of the defense capabilities (including other instruments of power) from the Cold War period through post 9/11 was to defend and deter aggression against the ROK.<sup>34</sup> One can also argue that the successful deterrence of aggression led to another defense objective and that is a lasting peace with the potential to unify the two Koreas. Although the U.S. and ROK strategic defense objectives for the peninsula have remained in harmony over the years there are three issues that warrant concerns because they strain the alliance. To begin with, peace and coexistence between the North and South is the most important aspiration of Koreans.<sup>35</sup> Korean people are strongly motivated to re-unite those families forcibly separated during the Korean War.

The ROK has gone to considerable lengths to appease the DPRK. For example, South Korea provided the North with millions of dollars in humanitarian assistance over the last five years despite struggling with their own economic problems.<sup>36</sup> The North has been the recipient of about 400,000 tons of food directly from the South and another 100,000 tons of grain through the World Food Program annually.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, the Hyundai Asan Corporation made a clandestine transfer of \$100 million to the North Korean leadership on behalf of the South Korean Government to facilitate a meeting between the two Korean Presidents.<sup>38</sup> The Hyundai Corporation falsified accounting records in an attempt to hide the payment, resulting in a financial scandal that led to several South Korean officials being indicted.<sup>39</sup> The ROK also played a role in getting the U.S. to dialogue with DPRK in the Six-Party Talks hosted by China. Although the ROK seeks to uphold a peaceful unification, the U.S. actions toward DPRK pose a challenge to accomplishing the goal.<sup>40</sup> This is particularly difficult since the President of the United States called North Korea an "Axis of Evil" and accused the Communist regime of proliferating weapons of mass destruction, counterfeiting, and drug and human trafficking.<sup>41</sup>

### Assessing Public Opinions

The U.S. and ROK have enjoyed a strong and successful alliance for over fifty years as the two countries have worked together to deter war and maintain peace on the peninsula. Most likely reunification of the North and South will not occur anytime soon because the two sides have been facing off in conflicts and confrontation for more than fifty years. The ROK strongly believes that peaceful settlement and coexistence is more important than anything else at the present time.<sup>42</sup> The "Sunshine Policy" represents the ROK's attempt to achieve a lasting peace

between the two Koreas and it is based on three principles. The first principle is that the ROK will not tolerate any armed provocation hampering peace on the peninsula; second, the ROK will not try to hurt or absorb North Korea; and third, the ROK will actively push reconciliation and cooperation with the North beginning with those areas which can be most easily agreed upon.<sup>43</sup> President Roh stated at his press conference with President Bush during the U.S. - ROK Summit on 17 November 2005 in South Korea that "a nuclear-armed North Korea will not be tolerated."<sup>44</sup> President Bush stated that DPRK must give up their nuclear weapons and/or programs before they will receive U.S. assistance. One can assume that President Bush did not literally mean "all types of assistance" because the U.S. has continued to provide food aid and medical supplies through the World Health Organization to fight the outbreak of avian influenza in April 2005.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, the ROK still provides assistance to DPRK; there is a strong desire by many Koreans to unify; and 58% of South Koreans do not view DPRK as a threat.<sup>46</sup> The U.S., on the other hand, believes DPRK to be a threat to Northeast Asia and the world. General Burwell Bell, Commanding General, United Nations Command/U.S. Forces Korea, testified before Congress that North Korea's weapons of mass destruction poses a threat to Northeast Asia and the world.<sup>47</sup> Paul Bracken, professor of political science and management at Yale University, argues that North Korea along with Iran, China, India, Pakistan, Syria and Israel pursued and/or stockpiled WMD. The DPRK and other rogue states can tip the balance of power in the region and present a global threat through "proliferation of missiles as Asia churns out greater numbers to offset U.S. defenses and changes tactics to make its attacks more effective."<sup>48</sup>

The U.S. – ROK Alliance is being strained by Koreans' anti-American sentiment. The mere eight year prison sentence for a soldier who murdered a Korean bar waitress for refusing to have sex with him and the acquittal of two soldiers who accidentally hit and killed two children while driving a military vehicle angered the Korean people and they responded with actions of protest. Some Koreans took actions such as murdering an Army officer at a shopping mall, kidnapping, and boycotting U.S. goods in retaliation.<sup>49</sup> The alliance is also being strained in Washington as well. It appears fifty years is long enough for many Korean people to forget the blood spilled by American Soldiers to defend freedom in Korea. The protestors argued that "MacArthur was a war criminal who massacred numerous civilians at the time of the Korean War."<sup>50</sup> The statue does not represent a domineering attitude of the U.S. over the ROK nor does it represent efforts to prevent unification between South and North Korea as some protestors have claimed. The statue issue upset several members of Congress. In fact, Senator Hillary Clinton weighed-in on the issue saying Korea bordered on historical amnesia. According to her

“South Koreans’ lack of understanding of the importance of our position there and what we have done over so many decades to provide them the freedom that they have enjoyed to develop the economy that is now providing so many benefits for South Koreans.”<sup>51</sup>

The U.S. was given perhaps the strongest evidence in recent years of just how deep anti-American sentiment goes when the 2004 survey results conducted by JoongAng Ilbo were released. The general opinion of the Korean people toward Americans is steadily declining. According to the survey of 1200 men and women over the age of 20, 54% of the Koreans who responded wanted U.S. forces out of Korea; only 42% of the respondents were concerned about an attack from North Korea; only 17% of the respondents admired the U.S. the most; and 37% of the respondents viewed China as being the most important country to the South Korean economy.<sup>52</sup> Upon digesting the survey data and recognizing the fact that “times have changed” an objective observer would be inclined to question the usefulness of American armed forces on the peninsula. But when considering the question of whether the USFK is still needed, the entire Asian region must be considered, and there are at least three areas of concern.

First, strategically and masterfully the North Korean regime has managed to negatively impact the U.S. – ROK Alliance. The DPRK always appears to dangle the unification issue in front of the ROK as a way to achieve some specific objective. Since the ROK Government views unification as the country’s number one priority and national interest, the sensitivity of any issue affecting that priority can easily cause the ROK to over react. The South Korean people are more concerned over issues affecting reunification cooperation and coordination than the possibility of war with North Korea. The political relationship between the two Koreas has come a long way since 1950. In 1992 the political relationship grew further with the two Koreas agreeing to a non-aggressive reconciliation and exchange program between the two countries.<sup>53</sup> The two Koreas’ political relationships advanced to a new level when South Korean President Kim Dae-jung and North Korean leader Kim Jong il signed the “North – South Joint Declaration” on 15 June 2000 in Pyongyang, North Korea.<sup>54</sup> The accord focused on:

Resolving the country’s reunification independently; work to resolve common elements pertaining to reunification; settle problems with separated families and long-term prisoners; promote economic, social, cultural, public health sports, and environmental cooperation; and maintain continued dialogue to ensure the implementation of the Declaration.<sup>55</sup>

North Korea has used the Declaration as a mechanism to express their concerns with South Korea for continuing to allow U.S. forces to remain in the ROK and to express the DPRK’s alleged fear of a U.S. invasion of the North to overthrow the regime. A sympathetic ear

by the South Korean people of North Korea's allegations and the potential for damaging the unification plan can easily fuel anti-Americanism on the peninsula.

A second concern involves how China fits into the international politics and influence within the Northeast Asian region. China has undergone a major economic transformation by ascending from a financially bankrupt country to a major trading center of goods in the Asia-Pacific region; replacing the U.S. "Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore already export more to China and send more investment capital to China than they do to the United States."<sup>56</sup> China's economic growth coupled with its growth in military ground forces is making China a major player in the Northeast Asia region and a growing influence throughout the Asia-Pacific region. In fact, more Asian countries are depending on China instead of the United States for economic growth.<sup>57</sup> Also, because of China's growing military power more Asian countries have started to adjust their realignments with China.<sup>58</sup> Some political science observers argue that "the ROK is closer to China than the U.S. in the six-party talks"<sup>59</sup> or that "the ROK no longer supports U.S. policy toward North Korea, but rather cooperates with China to undermine U.S. efforts to isolate and coerce North Korea."<sup>60</sup>

The purpose of the Six-Party talks is to establish a forum for the United States, China, South Korea, North Korea, Japan, and Russia to discuss and talk through the issues concerning the DPRK nuclear weapons program. China's influence in international politics can possibly be best seen during the September 2005 fourth round of the Six-Party Talks when they urged the DPRK and the U.S. to accept the September 19<sup>th</sup> Agreement that included ambiguous language on the light water reactor and allows North Korea to retain a civilian nuclear program.<sup>61</sup> North Korea reluctantly accepted the ambiguous statement about the light water reactor and "China made clear it was prepared to blame the U.S. for failure of the talks if it did not also accept the statement."<sup>62</sup> Although both South Korea and China stated that North Korea must stop their nuclear weapons program, their positions during the Six-Party Talks presents a challenge for the U.S. For example, "South Korean Unification Minister Chung Dong Young has proclaimed that the North is entitled to a nuclear program"<sup>63</sup> and the Chinese delegation for the November 2005 fifth round of the Six-Party Talks stated that the DPRK has a right to retain nuclear capability for their civilian nuclear energy program.<sup>64</sup> The U.S. representatives, however, were adamant about ceasing all nuclear operations to include nuclear operations for civilian nuclear energy programs until North Korea has fully dismantled its nuclear weapons program.<sup>65</sup> China's improved position in Northeast Asia, both militarily and economically, can be viewed by other countries in the region as a viable alternative to a U.S. alliance for maintaining regional stability. Countries in the region may seek to improve their foreign relations with China after taking into

consideration that Russia and China conducted a joint military exercise called "Peace Mission 2005" in August 2005. The exercise gave China an opportunity to observe some of Russia's weaponry that China will probably purchase. The exercise started in Russia and concluded in China under a scenario of the two countries responding in order to stabilize a fictional country within the region.<sup>66</sup> China's economic and military growth, improved China-Russia relations, along with China's support for North and South Korea cooperation, warrant considering China as a potential threat to the U.S.

The third area that must be considered with regard to continued presence of American armed forces on the peninsula is the U.S. - Japan relationship. The U.S.-Japan Alliance is steadily improving as the two countries seek a close and cooperative security relationship.<sup>67</sup> In 1999 the two countries agreed to cooperate in resolving emergencies within Northeast Asia, implement a Theatre Missile Defense system which would include launching spy satellites.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, Japan's desire to establish a strong alliance with the U.S. is partly based on Tokyo considering to link missile sensors and interceptors in Japan with the U.S. missile defense program.<sup>69</sup>

While the U.S. and ROK have enjoyed over fifty years as allies, the same cannot be said about Japan and South Korea. For example, during World War II (WW II), the Japanese forced Koreans to fight on the front lines and forced Korean women to serve as sex slaves for Japanese soldiers.<sup>70</sup> Japan also invaded China in 1931 and remained in Manchuria until the end of WWII. Despite the historic acts of violence against South Korea and China, Japan developed a cooperative relation with both countries. Japan provided considerable economic aid to the ROK that was critical to its economic growth. Japan also provided significant economic aid to China and in 1978 the two countries signed a peace and friendship treaty. Therefore, from a strategic perspective with the significant economic growth of China (in 2003 China traded more than \$852 billion becoming the world's fourth largest trading nation<sup>71</sup> and South Korea's number one trading partner<sup>72</sup>) and South Korea (Gross Domestic Product rose from 578,665 billion won in 2000 to 693,104 billion won in 2004.<sup>73</sup>) over the decades, Japan's positioning to strengthen its alliance with the U.S. is a rational course of action by Japan. It makes sense for Japan (a nation practically surrounded by countries with nuclear weapons capability) to enhance the security of the country through a U.S. Theatre Missile Defense program or other U.S. security systems.

As it appears that the ROK may be unwilling to serve as a projection platform for U.S. forces, the need for Japan to receive and stage more U.S. forces and retain a footprint within Northeast Asia is critical to U.S. national interest.<sup>74</sup> Japan may prove to be a much needed staging area if U.S. and China relations take a turn for the worse. During his recent trip to China

President Bush commented that Taiwan was an example of democracy; however, his comments did not go over well with the Chinese Government or its people. Although the U.S. does not support Taiwan's independence and "remains committed to [the] one China policy based on the three Joint Communiqués and the Taiwan Relations Act," President Bush has stated that the U.S. will defend Taiwan in accordance with the Taiwan Relations Act if attacked.<sup>75</sup> Therefore, Prime Minister Koizumi's willingness to accept larger U.S. bases in Japan will enhance America's military capabilities in Asia despite generating criticism of increased U.S. influence in the region by both North Korea and China.<sup>76</sup>

#### Strategic Impact of Reducing the U.S. Military Presence on the Peninsula

Strategically, the U.S. focus has been to preserve peace on the peninsula and stability within the region. In order to maintain that focus the U.S. has relied on a large U.S. military force deployed along side ROK forces to respond to the North Korean threat. U.S. and ROK forces on the peninsula do not appear large enough to defeat a robust North Korean military without suffering a significant number of casualties and destruction from DPRK's Taepo-Dong, Scuds, and other missiles according to Pennsylvania Congressman Curt Weldon, House Committee Member on Armed Services.<sup>77</sup> Some may argue that the ROK has the capability to defeat the North, however, one should not assume an ROK victory with certainty because of the military power of North Korea. The DPRK has a very dangerous army with the world's largest Special Operations Force (about 120,000) and has the ability to launch an estimated 500,000 missiles on South Korea within hours.<sup>78</sup> The ROK currently does not have the missile defense or air power capability to counter North Korea's artillery capability.<sup>79</sup>

The DPRK, with a military force of about 1.1 million, significantly outnumbered the ROK and U.S. forces on the peninsula of 680,000 and about 34,000 respectively.<sup>80</sup> The number advantage alone will not guarantee victory, but it does tend to improve the chance for success by wearing down the enemy with larger and more frequent attacks. U.S. Joint Forces Command and supporting combatant commands can provide remarkably more combat power such as U.S. Air Force Fighter Wings, U.S. Army Divisions, U.S. Marines Expeditionary Forces, among others by employing the following capabilities: the F-15 Eagle for air superiority; the F-15E Strike Eagle for enemy suppression; B-1 Lancer bomber; MQ-1 Predator for both reconnaissance and strike capability;<sup>81</sup> and additional brigade combat teams (BCT) are more self-sustaining and, therefore, can undertake longer durations of conflict.<sup>82</sup> Finally, stability in Northeast Asia not only includes the North Korean threat, but also the ongoing tensions between China and Taiwan.

North Korea is undergoing major internal problems such as: poverty, famine and disease, poor infrastructure, serious energy shortages, aging industrial facilities, poor maintenance and lack of new investments because the country focused fiscal resources on the military rather than on economic and social conditions.<sup>83</sup> Although the North receives a significant amount of humanitarian and economic aid from South Korea<sup>84</sup> and DPRK depends heavily on trading with China for oil and food,<sup>85</sup> North Korea appears to be involved in terrorism and criminal activities to generate funds. For example, on one occasion North Korean diplomats were apprehended abroad for drug trafficking and on another occasion a merchant ship attempted to smuggle heroin into Australia. The DPRK's past associations with terrorist violence created concerns that they will proliferate WMD.<sup>86</sup> The DPRK creates fear in Northeast Asia over the possibility of spreading nuclear weapons within the region.

If war breaks out on the peninsula, the ROK will most likely require considerably more than 34,000 U.S. troops to assist.<sup>87</sup> The need for U.S. forces within Northeast Asia capable of rapidly deploying from within the region instead of from the U.S. will enhance the ROK's ability to stop DPRK's aggression quickly. The joint and flexible capabilities of the U.S. forces such as air superiority, precision guided missiles, and BCTs that are more capable of independent action and more responsive to regional combatant commanders can give the ROK forces a distinctive edge during combat operations and ensure the U.S. strategic focus of maintaining stability within the region.<sup>88</sup>

Some have argued for removing or reducing the U.S. forces on the peninsula because DPRK's nuclear capability negates the need for U.S. conventional forces in the South.<sup>89</sup> Despite the lack of conclusive proof that North Korea actually has nuclear weapons; the DPRK may find it harder to prove that they do not have nuclear weapons. North Korea already admitted that they are conducting a nuclear weapons program and the North has extracted spent fuel and reprocessed the fuel into weapons-grade plutonium.<sup>90</sup> Although the nuclear argument may have some validity, a major U.S. concern is the need to have forward deployed basing to allow U.S. forces to project its military power. The forces in the ROK provide the U.S. with the capability to continue its deterrence mission and also to fight the Global War on Terror (GWOT) on foreign soil before it reaches the U.S.<sup>91</sup>

#### Republic of Korea's Movement toward a Self-Reliant Defense Posture

South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun has formally stated that he believes the ROK must do more and not leave its national security to the U.S.<sup>92</sup> According to President Roh, the ROK military has substantial capability to defend itself and is seeking to assume greater

responsibility for defending the ROK against the North. “The ROK spent \$16.4 billion last year on defense—roughly nine times North Korea’s outlay – and ranks eleventh in the world in total defense expenditures.”<sup>93</sup> Although President Roh advocates achieving a fully self-reliant defense posture, he also makes it clear that the U.S.-ROK Alliance will continue “its role of maintaining peace and stability on the Korean peninsula and in Northeast Asia”.<sup>94</sup> General Burwell Bell stated in response to Congressional questioning that ROK forces are already becoming more self-reliant as evident by the fact that the entire Demilitarized Zone is guarded by ROK forces.<sup>95</sup> Additionally, Michael O’Hanlon, a Senior Fellow at The Brookings Institute; and Peter Brooks, Senior Fellow for National Security Affairs and Director at The Heritage Foundation, testified before the House Committee on Armed Services about the strategic implications of U.S. troop withdrawal from Korea. Both men basically agreed with reducing the number of troops on the peninsula and letting the ROK assume greater responsibility for their self-defense. O’Hanlon believes the people of South Korea want to make more of the decisions about how to deal with the DPRK and how the U.S. deals with military base issues.<sup>96</sup> Mr. Brookes argues that reducing U.S. forces on the peninsula will give President Roh an opportunity to make good on his promise of taking on more responsibility for his country’s national security.<sup>97</sup>

#### Republic of Korea’s Role as a Power Balancer in the Region

President Roh announced that he wants the ROK to play a role as a power balancer within the region<sup>98</sup> and Defense Minister Yoon Kwang-ung carried that same message in his comments during the installation of the new Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Minister Yoon expressed the need for Korea to reduce its dependence on allies for security.<sup>99</sup> The ROK can enhance its potential toward becoming a power balancer within Northeast Asia by boosting the country’s defense capabilities, conducting military exchanges with China, and expanding Seoul’s military cooperation with other countries.<sup>100</sup>

Ruediger Frank, Professor of East Asian Political Economy at the University of Vienna, argues for the ROK becoming a power balancer, because “there appears to be a consensus in the international community that a multilateral solution to the issues of the North Korean nuclear threat and economic rehabilitation is preferable.”<sup>101</sup> Others, however, may argue that there already is a multilateral forum known as the “Six-Party Talks.” President Roh’s “Power Balancer Policy” has come under attack from Representative Park Jin of the opposition, Grand National Party, because he believes the policy will strengthen ties with China, distance Seoul from the U.S., and possibly place regional security at risk.<sup>102</sup>



## Conclusion

The U.S. - ROK Alliance is clearly going through some strenuous times and challenges. A myriad of issues, most notably 9/11 are causing the U.S. to reconsider the usefulness and efficiency of U.S. military forces permanently stationed in South Korea. According to the 2002 National Security Strategy of the United States of America, the U.S. will take preemptive acts as necessary to eliminate threats to the U.S. or allies and friends.<sup>103</sup> The National Security Strategy goes further in saying that the U.S. will remain watchful and alert towards the dangers of North Korea, but will also expect South Korea to shoulder greater responsibilities in order to contribute more to the stability of the Northeast Asia region.<sup>104</sup> United States Forces Korea is still needed on the peninsula. The USFK's reach back capability to Pacific Command and its commitment to the Mutual Defense Treaty plays a key role in assisting the ROK in deterring aggression from external attack and providing stability within the Northeast Asia region. Although the strategic defense objectives of the U.S. - ROK Alliance over the decades primarily centered around defending the ROK and deterring the DPRK aggression in order to maintain peace on the peninsula, force structure changes are warranted due to global security issues and the impact of non-state actors and terrorist groups. America's fight in the Global War on Terror and the realignment between countries such as China and South Korea or possibly China and Russia, and the pending desire for reunification of the two Koreas, makes a reduction of U.S. troops in Korea a wise decision.

Reduction of U.S. troops on the peninsula should not be viewed as a diminishing commitment to the alliance. A strong U.S. commitment to the alliance will continue as the U.S. enhances its missile defense capabilities and increases fire power.<sup>105</sup> The U.S. plans to invest \$11 billion in equipment and weapon systems for USFK troops.<sup>106</sup> Strategically, the reductions will also aid in alleviating some of the anti-American tensions on the peninsula by reducing the American footprint and providing the U.S. with a forward deployed basing to fight the GWOT and respond to emergencies within Northeast Asia and possibly throughout Asia-Pacific.<sup>107</sup>

The U.S. must work with the ROK to develop their defense capabilities and set the conditions for Seoul to become more self-reliant in providing for the security of their nation and in assuming wartime operational control of their forces. President Roh said in his speech to Korean Air Force Academy graduates that the ROK has military power that no one can challenge and sufficient capabilities to defend itself.<sup>108</sup> Michael O'Hanlon testified before the House Armed Services Committee that the South Korean forces are at least as strong as North Korea.<sup>109</sup> President Roh may have been a little over optimistic in his assessment of ROK forces,

but South Korea certainly has a remarkable military force that has the capability to enable South Korea to move toward and become a power balancer within the Northeast Asia region.

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